

VZCZCXYZ0006
RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHTL #0594/01 2531415
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 101415Z SEP 07
FM AMEMBASSY TALLINN
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0163

UNCLAS TALLINN 000594

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [RU](#) [EN](#)

SUBJECT: ESTONIAN RABBI DOWNPLAYS REPORTS OF ANTI-SEMITISM

¶1. (SBU) Summary. During a recent meeting with Poloffs, Rabbi E. Shmuel Kot said anti-Semitism is not a serious concern for Estonia's small Jewish Community. Kot also emphasized his efforts to remain outside of local politics and outlined the religious, social and educational opportunities offered by Estonia's new synagogue. The synagogue, opened in May, replaced one destroyed in WW II. End Summary.

SYNAGOGUE AS RELIGIOUS, EDUCATIONAL AND COMMUNITY CENTER

¶2. (U) On August 24, Poloffs met with Rabbi E. Shmuel Kot, Chief Rabbi of Tallinn's new synagogue. Estonia's previous synagogue was partially destroyed in a 1944 air raid and subsequently demolished in 1947. Until the new synagogue's dedication on May 16, Estonia was the only country in the European Union without a synagogue. In addition to a 200-seat prayer hall, the building houses a Mikvah (ritual bath), a kosher restaurant (slated for opening in October 2007), a museum chronicling the experiences of Estonian Jews in the 20th Century (to be opened in the near future), offices and meeting rooms. The construction of the synagogue was funded in large part by Alexander Bronstein of Moscow, a native of Tallinn, and the Rohr Family Foundation of Miami and New York, a major partner in the building of synagogues and Jewish Community Centers across the Former Soviet Union. Other notables on the private donor list include Prime Minister Andrus Ansip and Tallinn Mayor Edgar Saavisar.

¶3. (SBU) Rabbi Kot estimates Estonia's Jewish Community at approximately 3,000 members, 80% Russian-speaking, and mainly centered in and around Tallinn. While services are held in the Orthodox tradition, i.e., men and women are seated separately, the Rabbi underlined that his congregation also contains Reform and Liberal Jews, and that the synagogue does its best to cater to everyone. The Rabbi made the further point that non-Jews often come to the synagogue to pray before getting married, visiting the doctor, etc. The Rabbi noted that the synagogue also receives many visitors from cruise ships, particularly Americans.

¶4. (U) The synagogue complex also houses a school and community center. The community center offers programs ranging from dance classes to social clubs. Classes at the school, which are taught in Russian, are offered to students between grades five and twelve. According to the Rabbi, 80% of the children that attend the school are Jewish, but the rest are non-Jewish ethnic Russians. The Rabbi explained that non-Jewish students are welcome at the school, but they must learn Hebrew and take Jewish studies as part of the curriculum. As a state-sponsored school, the Rabbi indicated that they would be participating in Estonia's school language

reform program by teaching Estonian Literature classes in Estonian.

RABBI REPORTS LITTLE EVIDENCE OF ANTI-SEMITISM

¶5. (SBU) Rabbi Kot told us that he is not personally aware of any recent major acts of anti-Semitism in Estonia. He explained that, although they are a small minority of the population, Estonian Jews do not have many problems, commenting that "ethnic Russians and Estonians are too busy arguing and accusing each other to worry about the Jews." He underscored this point with the fact that during the rock-throwing Bronze Soldier riots last April, the glass-fronted synagogue was left completely unscathed. (Note. While the synagogue is not located near the epicenter of the rioting, a number of nearby shop windows were broken during riot-related looting. End Note.)

¶6. (SBU) The Rabbi emphasized the importance he places on keeping himself and the synagogue out of politics. To emphasize this point, he told us that during the fallout from Justice Minister Rein Lang's birthday party the Minister came to Rabbi Kot asking for support. The Rabbi said that while he likes Lang personally and was not offended by his actions, he declined to get himself or the synagogue involved by making a public statement of support. (Note. In early July, Minister Lang came under fire for hosting a performance of the play "Adolph" at his birthday party. The play is a monologue by Adolf Hitler before he commits suicide. Although Lang defended the incident and emphasized that "Adolph" is in fact an anti-fascist play, Lang's opponents accused the Minister of being a fascist and Nazi sympathizer. End Note.)

¶7. (SBU) Comment. Rabbi Kot's assessment stands in stark contrast to the recent flurry of accusations by Russia that there is a resurgence of Nazism and anti-Semitism in Estonia. The Rabbi's assessment matches that given by Cilja Laud -- former president of Estonia's Jewish Community -- in a conversation with the Acting DCM on August 21. In addition, Aleksandr Dusman -- leader of the Jewish Community in eastern Estonia -- echoed both the Rabbi and Laud in his September 5 conversation with the Ambassador during a visit to Narva. Post will continue to monitor further developments on this issue. End Comment.